

The American Dream

For the past few years, I have had the privilege of speaking at several commencements. I spoke on the topic of faithfulness to God. To catch the attention of the grads, I said, “Secular society today tells you that you can be anything you want to be. I am here to tell you that this is *not true!*”

I went on to explain that one of my best friends is Tom Abernethy. Tom played for Bobby Knight on the 1976 Indiana University basketball team, which was undefeated, and won the national championship. Tom is 6’7” and a gifted athlete. After college, he went on to play professional basketball.

In basketball, closer to the rim is better, so my chances of being a star in the NBA at 5’10” are slim to none ... and closer to none!

A few years back, I invited Tom to join me and two other men on a foursome for a charity golf scramble. Tom was late, so we began the round without him. After the three of us had placed our tee shots in the middle of the fairway about 250 yards out from the third tee, Tom arrived in a golf cart along with the golf pro. He had a hamburger in his hand and a Coke in the cart. He took one more bite of his sandwich and asked us where we were on the fairway. We explained, and he asked, after a few stretches, “How about I go for the green?” We told him to go for it. His ball landed 10 feet away from the pin on a 320-yard hole, and we putted it in for an eagle.

Now, I could hit a million tee shots and never put the ball on the green on a 300-plus-yard hole!

David Platt writes in *Radical*, a best seller, “As the American dream goes, we can do anything we set our minds to accomplish. There is no limit ... when we combine ingenuity, imagination, and innovation with skill and hard work.... The dangerous assumption we unknowingly accept in the American dream is that our greatest asset is *our own ability*.... The goal of the American dream [is] to make much of *ourselves*.... The goal of the gospel is to make much of God” (2010, 45–47; emphasis added).

While it is not true that we can be anything we want to be, it is true that we can be everything God created us to be. He has made each of us *on purpose* for a purpose—to glorify Him!

It is tempting for us as parents to embrace the American-dream mentality, to fall into the trap of secular thinking concerning the definition of success, as we

establish goals for our children. The trap sounds like this: get a private school education, go on to a top-level university, and land a high-paying job.

But God’s definition of success is quite different. Consider Joshua’s words to the children of Israel: “This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt ... have good success” (Joshua 1:8, KJV). The Bible’s definition is clear—meditation on the Word of God and obedience to it!

It is important that we give sound advice to our children and that we consistently and daily live out biblical values before them. It is important that we not sacrifice the eternal on the altar of the temporal. It is equally important that we surround our children with teachers and others who embrace the values dear to us, because we need all the help and support we can get as we raise our children to be successful in God’s sight.

In her book *Almost Christian*, Kenda Creasy Dean elaborates on the findings of the first wave (conducted 2002–2003) of the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR).¹ She summarizes NSYR findings in appendix B:

- “Finding #2: Most U.S. teenagers follow in their parents’ footsteps when it comes to religion” (201).
- “Finding #6: The single most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of adolescents is their parents” (203).

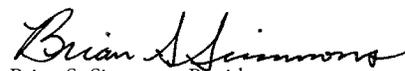
Bottom line? What we do and say as parents greatly influences our children. Let’s not settle for what we and our children can accomplish in our own power. Let’s refuse to operate in a mind-set dominated by the American dream. Instead, let’s submit our abilities to His power and plan. Let’s be a part of the dream that embraces an eternal perspective!

Note

1. See <http://www.youthandreligion.org/research> for details on the NSYR survey.

References

- Dean, Kenda Creasy. 2010. *Almost Christian: What the faith of our teenagers is telling the American church*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Platt, David. 2010. *Radical: Taking back your faith from the American dream*. Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books.


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The American Dream is the idea held by many in the United States that through hard work, courage and determination one could achieve prosperity. These were values held by many early European settlers, and have been passed on to subsequent generations. What the American dream has become is a question under constant discussion. This pattern " seeing the American dream as more about community and individuality than material success and social mobility " appeared across demographic and political categories. In the case of political party affiliation, for example, 84 percent of Republicans and independents said having freedom was essential to the American dream, as did 88 percent of Democrats; less than 20 percent of those in either party held that becoming wealthy was essential. Image.